



Trident Public
Health District

Shingles Fact Sheet

What Is <i>Shingles</i>?	Shingles is a viral infection of the nerve roots caused by the herpes zoster virus, the same virus that causes chickenpox. Shingles occurs as a result of reactivation of the virus in a person who has already had chickenpox. After a person has had chickenpox, the herpes virus becomes inactive in the roots of spinal nerves. The virus is activated when a person's immune system is weakened, possibly through physical or emotional stress. This reactivation results in a shingles infection.
What are the symptoms?	A person will usually experience pain usually 1 to 3 days before a bandlike rash (or rashes) appears on one side of the body. The rash develops over a period of 1 to 2 days and resembles a band or belt across a section of the body, typically on one side only. Blisters ooze and crust over after 5 days and heal completely within 2 to 4 weeks. After the rash heals, ongoing pain may persist in the areas where the rash occurred. Mild skin scarring may occur in some people. Most healthy people recover from shingles without any long-term complications.
How is <i>Shingles</i> treated?	Call your doctor immediately if you suspect you or someone in your family might have shingles. There are medications that can limit the pain and rash. The earlier treatment is started for shingles, the better the results of treatment. Medications are most effective if they are started within 72 hours of the start of the rash.
How do people catch this disease?	Shingles is only contagious to those who have never had chickenpox. People who have shingles are contagious for 1 to 2 days before the rash appears, and for up to 1 week after the start of the rash. When a susceptible person is exposed to shingles, he or she may get chickenpox but cannot develop shingles. A person's risk of getting shingles increases with age. A person is also more likely to get shingles if he or she has a condition that weakens the immune system.
What can be done to stop the spread of this disease?	People with shingles should avoid close contact with people until after the rash heals. Keeping the rash covered is helpful. It is especially important to avoid close physical contact with pregnant women, infants and people who have never had chicken pox. It is also important to avoid contact with cancer patients, transplant patients, HIV/AIDS patients or other people with a weakened immune system.

For more information about shingles, visit: www.cdc.gov/health/default.htm